

Lifestyles

'Exit the Body' - enter the mayhem at Pasadena Little Theatre



Colton Wright, Jeff Luchsinger, (seated Marla Miller), Steve Quimby, Anne Bryant and Samantha Salazar are all getting ready to search for the jewels which are supposedly at Marla's rented estate. This crazy bunch will wait for you until Sunday, Feb. 14, at 8 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays and 3 p.m. on Sunday. Call 713-941-1758 for reservations.

By **GLORIA WALKER SMITH**

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When mystery writer Mrs. Crane Hammond (Marla Miller) rented a rural estate in the boonies to rest and work on her next book, she couldn't have dreamed what happens as soon as she and her secretary, Kate (Renea Runnels) arrive.

Oh, the house is lovely and completely furnished (even to a liquor stock) and Kate (a consummate Manhattan dweller) was overjoyed to see they had running water and indoor plumbing, as well as electric lights throughout. Now, dealing with the backwoods maid, Jenny (Samantha Salazar) who was also furnished with the house, was something else. Connecting to the local telephone operator, Mabel, was another jolt for the sophisticated city dwellers!

Pasadena Little Theatre regular, Steve Quimby as Vern, was first their taxi driver from the train station to the house; later, the sheriff (the jail is his outhouse) and finally, searcher for 'jools'. He can't be beat for diversifying!

Responsible for bringing this motley crew together was the real estate agent, Helen O'Toole (Anne

Bryant). Having seen Anne in the widest variety of roles, I have come to expect her to be a winner in whatever part she plays. (Expectations fulfilled!) She later joins Vern in the jewel search, because she has a theory that the jewel thieves were to meet the "gate" (fence) in this house, so she's sure the diamonds are stashed here.

Making her debut at PLT but no novice to performing, Marla Miller had a 15-year tenure with Community Cup Theatre and developed a working relationship with Director Janet Sharpley. A four-year "vacation" from theater yielded her a degree in education and a teaching position with second graders. She is excited to be back and part of the PLT family. Discovering the exit-ing bodies caused her to perfect fainting in a heap on several occasions!

Samantha Salazar as the clueless maid made her debut at PLT as the glamour girl in "Lend Me a Tenor," after appearances in numerous musicals at Art Park, La Porte High School and Notre Dame University. This young lady is definitely 'honing her craft'.

Now at the point of being recognized on stage, Colton Wright (as the local boy, Randy, trying to make good as a crook, complete with instruction manual) was born into a family of entertainers, accounting in part for his ease on stage. When he's not "treading the boards," Colton is a student at San Jacinto College Central.

Renea Runnels as the city-girl-dumped-into-hick-country is convincingly appalled without being overdone. She likes to be acting on stage, but can handle being director or stage manager of a production.

After quite an absence from PLT, David Barron as Lyle Rogers (whose husband is he, anyway?) returns and gives a very good performance opposite Fashion Designer Lillian (Misty Thompson/nee' Banks). Barron has not been idle, having performed a gamut of roles in Houston theaters. Misty is all 'dolloed up', including very stylish hats. She has a big surprise for her writer friend, Crane! By the way, Lyle is the first "body."

Now we come to "wild and crazy" Jeff Luchsinger (Phillip Smith), a "familiar" at PLT for many years. This zany fellow is also quite a musician (part of a duo with his brother, Bob), as well as composing the score for PLT's "When Bullfrogs Sing Opera." I alluded to "mayhem" in the title and Jeff was a key player in that!

Joel Rodriguez, Jr. rounds out the cast as Crane's absent husband, Richard Hammond. In addition, Joel is Production Manager – no one-talent guy, is he. I especially remember how he stole the show as the wise-cracking bellhop in "Lend Me a Tenor." He also has a varied and impressive background, including "Guys and Dolls"; "Godspell"; and "Lilies of the Field," to name a few. He has been technical director for Alvin Community College, ten years with Miller Outdoor Theatre and an internship at A.D. Players.

Drum roll, please ...

Since hilarious Janet Sharpley has been circulating among the area theaters and I first saw her as the gregarious Truvy in "Steel Magnolias" at PLT, this one will MAKE YOU laugh! Whether she's directing a farce like this one or acting in one like "Cooking with Gussie" at Stage Door, Inc. or a string of others, Janet assures you're going to have a good time. The 7th and 8th graders at Bondy Intermediate must be lining up in the hall to get into Ms. Sharpley's Theatre Arts classes!

Assisting the director were Sheila Cedro as assistant director and Joyce Barnett as stage manager, about whom Sharpley says, "Thank you, Sheila, Joyce and Joel for all you did to keep me from having to do so much."

We were instructed by the greeter at the door to "laugh early and often." No problem there. Part of the fun of "Exit the Body" was listening to the laughter of the people around you. Isn't it always contagious?

Plan to see this comedy before it "exits" on Sunday, Feb. 14, at 3 p.m. As the director says, "It won't

change your life, but it will give your feet a rest."

Laughing gives your face something to do, too.

Evening performances are at 8 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, Sunday at 3 p.m. Call 713-941-1758 for ticket information or reservations.

The theater is located at 4318 Allen-Genoa.